

C A R I B B E A N E X A M I N A T I O N S C O U N C I L

**REPORT ON CANDIDATES' WORK IN THE
CARIBBEAN SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE[®] EXAMINATION**

MAY/JUNE 2013

**ENGLISH A
GENERAL PROFICIENCY EXAMINATION**

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GENERAL COMMENTS

Performance overall this year was fair. Approximately 58 per cent of the candidates achieved Grades I to III. This was an increase over 2012 when the percentage of candidates who achieved this level was 47. Performance on the Expression profile continues to be only moderate with only four per cent of candidates achieved Grade I on this profile. Students must be engaged in the myriad of ways in which language is used.

DETAILED COMMENTS

Paper 01 – Multiple Choice

Performance on Paper 01 was fairly good. The trend of good performance on the items assessing vocabulary, and grammar was again evident. Performance in comprehension questions based on literary, informative and persuasive passages was fair. Items which caused difficulty included those relating to recognizing and assessing the use of devices, recognizing mood, tone and style and distinguishing between the author's attitude and attitudes of characters

Paper 02 – Free Responses

SECTION A

Question 1

Analysis of this section has frequently appealed to teachers and students to pay more attention to it. The responses for July marking 2013 demonstrate some improvement, and suggest that the entreaties have been recognised.

The passage to be summarised was an article entitled ‘Water’ adapted from *Global Environment Outlook for Youth in the Caribbean – A Vision for Change!* The passage highlighted the current situation in which the world is in imminent danger of water shortage, partly because water is taken for granted in some places while the supply is abused in others. The world does in fact does have sufficient water for all, but modern management measures must be employed to ensure continued world supply. The passage also points out the importance of water supply to economic prosperity, and indeed to the well being of human society.

This section was allotted 30 marks distributed evenly in 3 areas under Profiles 1 and 2.

PROFILE 1	PROFILE 2	
<i>Content</i> (understanding)	<i>Organisation</i>	<i>Language</i>
10 MARKS	10 MARKS	10 MARKS

Content

- There was improvement with regard to meeting the word limit and attempting the question.
- The vast majority of candidates understood well that the passage was about water supply. They also picked up on the inadequacy of current conservation strategies and the need to ensure that water would be available for future generations. Despite their understanding of these key issues, some candidates lost marks in Area 1 because they were unable to express said issues accurately and coherently with respect to the original passage. E.g. in the statement:

“At the global scale there is enough water to provide water security for socioeconomic, technical and institutional aspect of water use”

Students seemed to have recognised and understood the point but repeated the words “*At the...security*”, and then copied the last part: “*for socioeconomic ... water use*” out of context because they did not grasp the correct relationship.

The following are some of the distortions noted:

- the scarcity of water was seen as a present reality but not as a future crisis, so in many cases there was no reference to the looming water crisis
- water shortage was misinterpreted and referred to as water storage
- ‘forecast’ (para 2) was aligned to weather reports.
- attempts to meet the word limit by using telegraphic language resulting in incoherent responses.

Superior responses demonstrated excellence in reproducing the critical elements of the original passage in the candidate’s own words, most often in flawless or near flawless language. In a few instances responses indicated a superior understanding of content but some weakness in language. Responses assessed as suggesting or demonstrating incompetence included one or more of the following:

- The introduction of extraneous material based on prior knowledge, both technical and casual.
- Misinformation prompted by imperfect understanding of details. E.g. “While a political commitment is not simple, we must demand it.” This was entirely out of context and based on two sentences in the original: “*The best initiatives are those that make a political commitment to consider water as an integral part of sustainable human development...*”; “*There is no quick fix or simple solution when it comes to safeguarding and managing a resource that is in as much demand as water.*”
- Incomplete ideas.

Organization

The passages used for examination purposes are paragraphed. They follow the principles of paragraphing: a topic sentence and a number of supporting sentences. In writing summary, students are taught to recognise the topic sentence in each paragraph, and to use the meanings generated from them to create a generalized piece of writing. This suggests that the length of the piece they submit will not allow the use of paragraphs. This is a concept grasped and demonstrated by the superior student, and the understanding of the generalization principle is important for all students if they are to improve their skills in summary.

Superior responses were easily recognizable due to the smooth transition from one thought to the other and the demonstrated ability of the candidate to re-arrange the original passage into a coherent whole while maintaining its perspective, purpose, tone, as well as sense of audience without losing content.

Responses at a low level of competence follow the paragraphing of the original slavishly. They do not recognise the relationship between points that do not follow each other in the original. They generally show a passive understanding of some sentences and phrases in the extract and reproduce these verbatim. Examples of this in the paper under review include:

- At the global scale, there is enough water to provide “water security” for all...
- The scarcity of water is a very relative concept...
- A basket of factors including socioeconomic, technical and institutional aspects of water use...
- Sustainable human development...
- Inequitable distribution of water...
- Our managerial capacity has to be upgraded...

Included below are the salient points of the passage, and one of the sample summaries used to standardize the marking.

- *Water is vital to all aspects of life and human activity. It is often taken for granted and its value is overlooked.*
- *Water scarcity means different things in different places but everywhere it relates to a country's economic and social activities and to people's attitudes to water.*
- *World shortage is not actual because there is really enough water for all, but the threat is caused by careless attitudes, outdated management of resources, and waste. The impact is that a very large portion of the world will face real scarcity by 2025.*
- *Attention must be given to the problem in order to ensure that future generations have water and that the needs of the poor are addressed.*
- *The solution will come from a change in our attitude to water use, the appropriate valuing of water, and the employment of updated management strategies.*

Sample summary:

People today seldom think of water shortage; however, it is predicted that by 2025 this could be a reality for billions. The crisis will not result from real water scarcity, but from poor management and attitudes. Addressing the problem means considering all factors related to water use. Water is critical to each country's economic and cultural well being, and ideal practices must focus on sustainable human development and the reduction of poverty. If water is to be distributed equitably we have to recognise its value and the need to conserve for the future. The answer will not be found easily, and requires that management practices be updated to meet modern requirements.

(111 words)

Advice to Teachers

Judging from the relatively few instances of 'no response' to Section A, students are more willing to attempt summary writing. However, they continue to be hindered in their efforts by inadequate vocabulary which affects both comprehension and summary production. There is also low/no use of

connectives resulting in summaries that read more like lists of bulleted items than continuous prose. Generally speaking, however, there has been improvement in candidates' ability to meet the demands of this section. Following are some suggestions to keep the improvement going:

- Introduce summary writing early – some students need to start in the first year of secondary school, particularly if their reading levels are not up to required standard.
- Constantly reinforce vocabulary and effective punctuation.
- Give students practice in writing within a specified word limit.
- Provide students with activities aimed at understanding and using appropriate connectives.
- Provide students with activities aimed at mastering interpretation and construction shift.
- Encourage students to use their own word; discourage lifting from original passages.

SECTION B

In keeping with the specifications of the syllabus and the design of the Specimen Paper, poetry can be used on Paper 2, and in Paper 1. Analysis of the results in this year's examinations indicated that the two stimuli used created a good balance.

Question 2

In this section candidates were able to benefit from the allocation of marks for partial answers. The allocation of marks allowed candidates to score 1 point on questions with a full score of 2 marks. On the other hand, candidates lost marks when they failed to be specific as required, or put answers which required the examiner to select the correct response.

The poem “Carrion Crows” was within the candidates’ experience. They clearly understood what the poem was about. Candidates were aware that there were negative and positive aspects about the behavior of the crows themselves, but not all were able to make these distinctions between the crows’ attitude, the poet’s attitude, and the poet’s craft. It was evident that a few candidates found Questions (d) and (g) challenging because they lacked the vocabulary to describe what they knew. These questions required understanding of the terms “effect” and “attitude”. On the other hand, the answers to (a) (b) and (c) which required explicitly stated information, were generally correct. Some candidates seemed unsure of what to identify specifically as alliteration and metaphor, and quoted the entire line in which the device was used: " And I have seen them perched on paling post" as opposed to "perched on paling post".

Question 3

There were a few “No Responses” for individual parts of this question, possibly because of poor time management, and also because questions demanded interpretation and deduction. Question (h), “what action concerning the environment would be recommended to the government of Socrato based on the information in the last paragraph”, was one such question. Most candidates listed recommendations that were based on what the passage stated as problems: for example some recommended that over fishing and excess road building should stop. The weaker candidates made recommendations about environmental issues that the passage/paragraph did not address. The better candidates, it seems, were either in command of effective comprehension strategies, and were able to make recommendations with more far-reaching effects on the environment such as “Be careful about development which disturbs and destroys the natural environment”.

Advice to Teachers

- It is recommended that teachers pay closer attention to writer's techniques, attitudes and purpose, and to commenting on the effectiveness of devices used.

- Candidates still need practice in quoting relevant and specific phrases and identifying key words.
- Candidates require more help in determining what specific questions ask, so that their responses may be specific.

SECTION C

Question 4

Although the story based on the picture is not usually very popular with candidates, this year it was the one which most candidates attempted. Perhaps this was because most candidates would have been familiar with the scenario, even if only vicariously. Perhaps because of this familiarity, many candidates did not seem to have worked very hard to produce interesting responses. Most were therefore simple, very similar, predictable narratives which lacked creativity.

Question 5

Of the two questions set for story-writing this proved the more challenging. Many candidates experienced difficulty incorporating the sentences into their answers. Skilled candidates responded to the stimulus in effective, interesting ways. This does not suggest that the question was too difficult: candidates writing this examination should be able to cope competently with a question like this. Unfortunately this stimulus was seen by many as an opportunity to produce television-styled violence instead of effective characterization and meaningful conflict.

Question 6

This question required a descriptive essay based on the stimulus “It was all done; all the groups were sure that nothing more could be added. Emotions were mixed as we quietly studied that large room. Describe the scenes and reactions you saw.”

Although more candidates have a clearer understanding of the requirements of a descriptive essay than previously, the number of responses remains in the minority. The problems persist:

- Most candidates who attempted the question were unable to differentiate between a descriptive essay and a story. Even when there was description, it was bound to particular characters or locations in the narrative.
- There was again misinterpretation of the question so many responses were weak or irrelevant. Many candidates did not see or did not understand “*It was all done;*” or could not figure out how it was important to the response.

There is concern about the significant amount of interference from local creoles/dialects on the Standard English of large numbers of candidates writing this exam. Examples of this interference were again seen in areas such as the non-marking of past tenses, weak spelling, and the use of pronouns which have no antecedents.

Other problems with the mechanics of the language continue to be evident; for example;

- punctuation, especially in run-on sentences - perhaps this problem is indicative of a more serious issue: lack of understanding of sentence structure.
- non-use of paragraphs - many candidates write pages of the story in one long unbroken block.

Advice to Teachers

- There is a pressing need to deal with the issues of (1) relevance, (2) singularity of event, and to a lesser extent (3) point of view, so that candidates may better meet the requirements of length and focus in their stories.
- Candidates are asked in this section to use Standard English to respond to a **particular stimulus**. Candidates need to be encouraged to be self critical where relevance is concerned. Weak candidates and those with a low level of competence tend to write pages of script before getting to the point of the response. The importance of ‘point of view’ and the need to control it must be emphasized so that clarity of the plot is maintained.

SECTION D

Questions 7 & 8

Overall, there were improvements in the use of language -grammar and mechanics in particular, in comparison to previous years. With regard to time management, this year it seems that more candidates answered the questions. There were fewer incidents of "No Response". Despite the shortcomings of some candidates who answered the questions in letter format or in the narrative form, it was clear that most candidates understood the concept of persuasive writing and used devices and transitions as needed.

The questions to which candidates responded are below.

Question 7

“Government should offer free health care for everyone residing in a country, nationals and non-nationals alike.”

Write an essay EITHER supporting OR opposing this view.

Question 8

“School principals should consult with the student body on ALL matters affecting the lives of the students.”

Write an essay giving your views on this statement.

Question 7

- Some candidates misinterpreted the term ‘non-national’, and either ignored or did not understand the word 'residing' - which should have given them the hint as to what "non-national ' meant.
- Some candidates did not define the key terms from the chosen stimulus, while other had incorrect definitions.
- Little or no supporting evidence was given for the perspectives being given in the essay.
- Many students agreed that health care should be free but did not present clear arguments that demonstrated the benefits of such a venture.
- A few candidates interpreted the word "country" to mean a rural area, rather than their home territory.

Question 8

- Many candidates misinterpreted the term "student body" to mean the Students' Council or the students' physical bodies.
- The word "consult" created some ambiguity which resulted in various interpretations . Common among these interpretations, was the notion that "consult" referred to the principal's role as counselor.
- The expression ‘all matters' was not handled effectively.

- The points posited by candidates were generally not well developed. There was an absence of supporting details or appropriate rhetorical devices. Some candidates merely listed the issues without any attempt to argue how consultation would address these issues.
- Most of the issues identified were home related such as divorce, violence and abuse.

Advice to Teachers

- There continues to be significant concern that too many candidates have sentence construction challenges: sentence splices; hanging sentences; fragments; and run-on sentences. Many used the vernacular of their countries.
- Instruction may benefit from the use of more class discussions in which students are challenge to say WHY they hold their perspectives.
- Opportunity to critique written arguments from well-known persons or good Internet sources should go some way in encouraging better understanding and production of argument.